LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1515

The Love Affair of a Priest and a Nun

(ABELARD AND HELOISE)

Joseph McCabe

BEST FICTION

8 Lady Windeermere's Fan
38 Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
79 Enoch Arden, Tennyson
182 Daisy Miller
215 The Miraculous Revenge
292 Mlle, Fifi and Other Stories
333 Mulvaney Army Stories
350 Hedda Gabler, Ibsen
353 Doll's House, Ibsen
375 Love Story of an Old Maid
378 Covered Wagon
399 Sinbad the Sailor
538 Robin Hood
620 Pilgrim's Progress
886 Piece of String
887 The Necklace
915 Mad and Other Stories
916 Night in Whitechapel
918 Room No. 11
920 Queer Night in Paris
921 Mme. Tellier's Establishment
922 Wife's Confession
1157 The Sea Beast
1196 Girl With Three Husbands
1605 The Girl in a Snappy Roadster
1627 A Piece of the Princess

Any 10 for $1, 20 for $2, etc. PREPAID.

Free catalogues with every order. Write only the numbers on a scrap of paper, with your name and address. Send cash, check or money order to:

Little-Blue-Books Dept. CV Girard. Kans

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1515

The Love Affair of a Priest and a Nun

(ABELARD AND HELOISE)

Joseph McCabe

GIRARD, KANSAS

Copyright,

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE LOVE AFFAIR OF A PRIEST AND A NUN

(ABELARD AND HELOISE)

A pretentious little book was published a few years ago with the title "The True Story of Abelard and Heloise." It is, in fact, little more than an encyclopedia article on the famous pair and does not differ from any recent book on the subject. There is in modern times no "false story" to be refuted. The last libel of Abelard was published in 1863, in Cotter Morison's "Life of St. Bernard." Morison was a Positivist and had an entirely perverse admiration of St. Bernard and the medieval Church. On the strength of documents to which no historian of our time pays any attention he represents Abelard, as soon as he won fame as a teacher at Paris, indulging "a fierce, fiery thirst for pleasure, sensual and animal." We are told that he "drank deeply, wildly." But he then "grew fastidious and particular." He "required some delicacy of romance, some flavor of emotion, to remove the crudity of his lust. He seduced Heloise."

This is sheer melodramatic monkish gossip reproduced in the prurient-puritan accents of the Rationalists of the Victorian age in England. Until Abelard met Heloise he had been strict in his life. He gives us that assurance

at a time when he was as deeply religious and remorseful as any man in France, and no serious historian hesitates to accept it. But the recent little work to which I have referred, and in fact most of the popular allusions to Abelard and Heloise, are in a different way just as misleading. It speaks of "the love-letters of Abelard and Heloise" as the supreme representatives of amorous literature, the peerless gem of the collection, and so on. Hundreds of editions of the letters have appeared in various languages, and they never fail to be described as "love-letters." As they are published, they generally are love-letters. The translator has seen to that. Even the most romantic of translators has some difficulty in getting the faintest allusion to love into the letters of Abelard, which were written in iced ink from beginning to end, but they are so manipulated that they are brought broadly under the title. Israel Gollanz included them in "The Temple Classics," a pocket edition very neatly presented; but the version of Abelard's letters is as if someone had rewritten the Lamentations of Jeremiah in the language of a Persian poet. Nearly all the versions are in one degree or other most misleading. Scott-Moncrieff a few years ago brought out a new version which I have not

seen—at the British National Library they wanted me to go to read it in the special room in which they put us to read Havelock Ellis or the Arabian Nights and I snortingly declined—so I say nothing about it, but I know no version of the Letters which does not misrepresent them.

In the first place they are not love-letters and ought never to have been included in that type of literature. An amorous correspondence implies two lovers, whereas at the time when Abelard wrote these letters he had, by physical mutilation and years of deep suffering, lost even the feeblest capacity for emotion and looked back on his love of many years earlier with the utmost horror. His language would have chilled, if it did not convert, a maid of Andalusia. It is inhuman in its bleak attitude toward love and life. For a short time Heloise seems to have tried to rekindle in his heart some sort of chaste affection for her, but after her second letter she realized that his heart was quite dead and she abandoned the attempt. Of a hundred pages of correspondence between the two only four or five, in the letters of Heloise, are concerned with love, and the translation of these generally falsifies their significance. They are really amazing declarations

for the Middle Ages, and on the part of the abbess of a strict nunnery, yet they are not love-letters in the ordinary sense. I should like to point out the surprising features of them, the remarkable light they throw on that rather obscure age: and I will translate directly and literally from the Latin the principal passages to which I refer.

Everybody knows something about the famous love-affair which so captivated the heart of France in a later age that they put the remains of the abbot and abbess in a common tomb in the chief cemetery of Paris, where young men and women still lay flowers in memory of their love. Who Heloise really was we do not know. We first meet her about the year 1117, when she was about eighteen years old, living in Paris with an uncle who was a Canon of the Paris cathedral. He was passionately fond and proud of her, and it was not usual for clerical dignitaries to have pretty nieces living with them. It is said that she had been educated at the nearby convent of Argenteuil, which was very fashionable and very lax. These are irresistible ingredients for a romance, and it was at all events said in a later age, and may be perfectly true, that she was the daughter of Canon Fulbert and the

Lady Abbess of Argenteuil. When her bones were transferred to Paris in the eighteenth century they were examined by a medical man, and he pronounced that she must have had a handsome and finely-proportioned figure. Abelard merely says that she "was not the least in beauty of face"; but that was in the days when he thought pretty faces were snares of the devil.

Let us imagine the young lady as a lovely maid of seventeen or eighteen living with her fond uncle in one of the old houses on the edge of the island in the middle of the Seine. It was the time when school-life had been reestablished in France, and there was, in fact, quite a fever of intellectual work. There were a dozen schools at Paris, generally attached to the abbeys, and probably several thousand pupils had been attracted from all parts of France and Europe. In provincial schools one learned the elements of knowledge: grammar (or Latin literature), rhetoric (or the art of disputing), music, and so on. At Paris and in the other cities some stufffy and safe old divine lectured every day on such points of theology as lay open to discussion and interpretation: such as —this is literally one of the points—"whether Mary felt pain or pleasure at her conception."

But an element of gaiety had been introduced. Not only did the students of the various provinces and nations brawl and sing on the playing fields and in the numerous taverns of the green district which is now the squalid Latin Quarter of Paris, but a man could stand up to the master in the school and dispute his opinion. It was not so much an age of positive knowledge as of keen rhetoric, and bands of disorderly students roved from school to school, and even town to town, whenever a brilliant new master or opponent of a master was heard of.

Heloise took a keen interest in the school-life. It was in the first place the most conspicuous and unavoidable feature of the life of Paris at the beginning of the twelfth century. It had grown out of all proportion to the civil and commercial life of the city. But the worst age of the subjection of women had not yet been reached in Europe, and there were schools for women: not merely convent schools such as that in which Heloise had received her early education but schools of philosophy and literature in which lay women taught. Canon Fulbert also was something of a scholar, and he saw that his "niece" wrote good Latin and

read the Latin classics. She already had quite a name for literary accomplishments in Paris.

The latest sensation of the school-world was that a brilliant Breton scholar named Peter Abelard, who had been tilting at the older masters for years, had beaten his last and most learned opponent and won his place in the chief school, and he was attracting unprecedented crowds of students by his dazzling and daring lectures. No scholar could stand against him. At the age of thirty-seven he had driven out the most famous teachers of Christendom and he turned into ridicule any man who came to his school to oppose him. No woman could attend the school at Notre Dame, but it was close to the Canon's home on the island, and all Paris pointed out the figure of the gifted master when he came to and left the school. He was very handsome, too, and, according to Heloise, all the maids and matrons of Paris sighed as he passed indifferently amongst them. He was one of those cold intellectual machines whose vitality is entirely absorbed in study and ambition.

The next sensation of Paris was when the brilliant teacher became a lodger of Canon Fulbert and tutor of his accomplished niece: a dangerous approximation in an age which

was just as truly the dawn of sentiment, of chivalry, as of intellect. Abelard confesses that he had already fallen in love with Heloise and had taken up residence in the Canon's house to be near her. The cleric was tempted by the offer of a large payment and private lessons to his niece; and he was disarmed by Abelard's reputation for indifference to women. But soon, says Abelard, there were "more kisses than lessons," and "my hands went more easily to her breasts than to the books." Soon, says Heloise in turn, "my name was sung in every street, nay every house of Paris." She means that, to the astonishment first and then the delight of the city, the great and merciless dialectician was composing lyrics of the most glowing description, and all Paris, which sang them in the open-air taverns, knew the inspiration.

Abelard tells the sequel in his first letter, "The Story of My Calamities." A dozen years later he found himself the abbot of a quaint body of monks on the coast of Brittany. Each monk had a wife and children, and all that they wanted of the new lord abbot was that he should use his famous gift to get more meat and wine, which were scanty, for them and their families. When he began to

lecture them on their wild and improper ways they put poison in "the blood of Christ" which he drank from the chalice in the mass. They hired a few cutthroats and whenever the abbot went about the country these men tried to ambush him. It was a horrid situation for one of the most brilliant scholars of Christendom. He had fled to the limit of France, to the wild shore of the Atlantic because Paris and every other town seemed to be full of enemies and mockers. A synod of stupid clerics, led by bitter opponents and rivals, had condemned him as a heretic. He was being denounced all over France in the terms which Cotter Morison foolishly reproduces, yet his life was in danger in Brittany because he was an apostle of virtue. It was in these circumstances that he wrote the first of the series of letters, and it was certainly not a love-letter. It was an account of his sufferings written to some anonymous friend. The name Philintus, which appears in some versions as that of his friend, is as fictitious as a good deal of the letter.

The only part of this that is interesting and significant, apart from its autobiographical material, is a very long passage in which he gives the arguments of Heloise against mar-

riage. Fulbert had at last been convinced of the amorous relation and had dismissed Abelard from the house. They met secretly, and one day Heloise wrote him, not with the usual tears and trepidations but with "the greatest joy," that she was to become a mother. He took her, disguised as a nun, to his sister's house, near Nantes, where little Astrolabe was born. The romanticists who enthuse over the "immortal love" fight shy of the name of the child. It is the name of an astronomical instrument which the Moors had introduced into Europe! It was a highly intellectual business from beginning to end, even Heloise protesting all through that it was not "lust" she sought. Abelard was very concerned to keep his love and his career, and he went back to Paris to conciliate the Canon by offering a secret marriage. It is not clear that he was then a priest, and not certain that at that time he could not marry even if a priest, but marriage would certainly cut him off from higher advancement. Celibacy was being enforced from the top downward.

They came back and were secretly married in the presence of the Canon, but the remarkable thing is that Heloise was strongly opposed to the idea of marriage. She held that

marriage would ruin his public life and be a calamity to him and the world. She urged him to see "what curses would fall on her, what tears of philosophers would be shed, what a loss it would be to the Church." She pointed out "how indecent, how lamentable, it would be if a man whom nature had created for all should be linked to one woman." She reminds him of St. Paul's opinion of marriage, and then, if he will not listen to Paul, let him ponder what Theophrastus and Cicero and Seneca say about it. A great scholar like Abelard, she says, must be kept away from the crying of babies and the fuss of nurses and the unpleasant sights connected with babies. They would not be able to live in a big house where these things could be kept from him. She returns to the pagan philosophers, quotes Josephus on the ways of the Essenes and Nazareans, brings Jerome and Augustine to bear on the situation. Think of the fate of poor Socrates, she says; and she reminds him how when his wife Xantippe, after a violent tirade, emptied a certain vessel of a certain liquid over him, the poor philosopher could only say: "After so much thunder one expects rain." In fine, she asks him to see "how much sweeter it would be for her and better for me

to call her friend than wife, so that affection, not the coercion of the bond of matrimony, should keep me to her"; and she predicted that her uncle would never be reconciled, so it was useless.

We shall see in a moment how Heloise amplifies this remarkable modernist note of her argument against marriage, but she was at least right about Fulbert. He began to boast that his niece was married to the great teacher, and, when people came to Heloise to ask, she swore on oath that it was false. From the rows which followed Abelard rescued his wife by placing her in the convent at Argenteuil, where she dressed as a nun though she did not take the vows, and, as it was a more than liberal convent, he had free access to her there. So Fulbert took his horrid revenge. He bribed Abelard's valet and, while he lay in bed, he was castrated. There was a terrific uproar in Paris, not so much at the nature of the multilation, which was not uncommon in those pious days, but because Abelard was the idol of the city. Heloise would have us believe that the ladies shed streams of tears. The valet and the hired man were caught and lost their eyes and genitals; and Abelard, when he recovered a little, as he miraculously did—

you will agree that it was a miracle if you know anything about surgery in the twelfth century, when men had no idea of the circulation of the blood—even demanded that Fulbert should be fined in the same way.

Here began the calamities of Peter Abelard. From the most brilliant teacher in Europe he became an object of pity and shame, cut off by his condition from all higher ecclesiastical preferment. He decided to become a monk at the royal abbey of St. Denis, and the monks, not being psychologists, welcomed the accession of the gifted teacher and song-writer and especially the song-writer. It was, says Abelard, an abbey of "worldly and most disgraceful life." Abbot Adam was the gayest of them all, and, when Abelard, the new Abelard, began to chide them for the "abominable filth" of their lives, they reflected that they had taken a serpent to their bosom. When the poor man went on to discover that St. Denis was not the man they thought, and was imprudent enough to say so, they boiled over with wrath. So he was hauled before a synod and condemned, and he looked with scorn on the crowd of stupid churchmen who filled the cathedral, and the Papal Legate who knew and cared no more about theology than the

local barber, and the townsfolk who gathered to stone "the eunuch of St. Denis." It is of this synod that legend tells an amusing story, but I doubt if I can put it in English. "Do you condemn?" asked the president. "We condemn," said a sonorous voice. Now in Latin it is "condemnamus," and the last part of that word "namus" means "we are swimming"; and the story is that most of the bishops and abbots, feeling drowsy with wine, caught only the "namus" and repeated it. They were all swimming. "Good Jesus, where wert thou?" Abelard asks, as he runs over the story. But how he began teaching once more and turned a wilderness into a town, and how the persecutor still raged and he fled to Brittany, do not belong here.

The touching story of his calamities was copied and circulated in France, and someone sent a copy to Heloise, who was now the prioress of the great nunnery at Argenteuil. Abelard had insisted that she should become a a nun, before he became a monk, and unfortunately she consented. It was the rule of the time that a man's wife must enter a nunnery if he wanted to enter a monastery. He sketches lightly the last scene, at which he must have been present; and I doubt if there

was ever in history so strange a ceremony of profession. It seems too dramatic to be true, but Abelard was now a very prosy and strictly truthful man. Friends clung to Heloise in the chapel and begged her not to make the terrible sarcifice. They all wept and sobbed together. It seems incredible, but Abelard assures us that the girl-mother broke from them and recited aloud a few lines of the pagan poet Lucan that came to her memory:

O spouse most great!
O thou whose bed my merit could not share!
How hath an evil fortune wrought this wrong
On thy dear head? Why, hapless, did I wed,
If this the fruit that my affection bore?
Behold the penalty I now embrace
For thy sweet sake!

So, with Lucan on her lips instead of Paul, her eyes streaming with tears, she walked to the altar, took the black veil from it, and wrapped her life in it. What a woman she would have been if she had lived in our day! And this was only the first of her calamities. The gay Abbot Adam at St. Denis died and was replaced by the severe Abbot Sager, and the new abbot discovered, he says, "the foul enormity" of the life of the nuns at Argenteuil, and he got them evicted and annexed the building and estates of St. Denis. Alebard then had the building and estate he had created by his teaching in the country, before

he went to Brittany, transferred to Heloise and there for the rest of her years she was the highly respected abbess of a reasonably strict nunnery with the austere and devitalized Abelard as spiritual director.

Abbess Heloise in her distant convent of the Paraclete gets a copy of Abelard's letter. He had not only not sent it to her, but he had, she complains, not written a line to her since he had parted from her in the conventual chapel more than ten years earlier. One sees from this the utter absurdity of "translations" of the letters which make Abelard say in his first letter.

> Ah, Philintus, does not the love of Heloise yet burn in my heart? I have not yet triumphed over that unhappy passion. In the midst of my retirement I sigh, I weep, I pine, I speak the dear name of Heloise and delight to hear the sound.

It is exactly the opposite of what Abelard says about his "sin." But Heloise does not seem to have realized how completely transformed he was, and she sent off a letter to him in distant Brittany. This is the letter which Pope professes to give in English verse, but one ought rather to say that his poem is founded on certain passages of the letter of Heloise. It is probable that Pope never saw the Latin originals of the letters, and in his time every library had one or more of the

supposed translations. The passages in question are certainly remarkable and I will translate them directly from the Latin, but I would give a word of warning. It was an age of rhetoric, and the letters of Heloise are often, not spontaneous out-pourings in the language she spoke every hour, but rhetorical compositions in Latin. She knew the language perfectly. She writes, in my opinion, a better Latin than Abelard and most other writers of his time. That her heart spoke also you will not doubt for a moment when I reproduce the more emotional passages, but, although men like Pope and the French writers of the eighteenth century could easily take every word literally, no one who reads the original will fail to perceive that Heloise is compiling an elegant Latin letter to send to a great scholar; and the way in which her real sentiments break out at times through the formal composition is very interesting.

She complains that Abelard writes to others and not to her. She became a nun only in obedience to him; to prove that she was his, body and soul. She thought of nothing in the world but him. When she married him she did not seek a dowry or even pleasures. She wanted, not marriage, but him:

And though the name of wife seems holier and more approved, yet the name of friend—nay, if it anger you not, of concubine or whore—was always sweeter to me. Thus in humiliating myself the more for you I should find greater favor in your sight and should do less harm to the glory of your reputation.

This is the language which enables the romanticists to turn the whole letter into an erotic epistle, yet over and over again, Heloise protests that it is not "lust," as she calls it, or the sexual pleasure itself, which she sought. She rarely used even the word "love." She is not at all consistent, as we shall see, but in the main she insists that it is union with the brilliant and famous Abelard that she prizes above all things. To me the significant and interesting thing is just that she is not a passionate woman defying the law of the Church in her thirst for sexual pleasure but a woman who, while cordially accepting sex and love as part of the union, and even at times recalling their "joy" with obvious delight, very deliberately would control her own life without regard for received canons of conduct. She takes up at once the long passage in his letter in which he tells his friends how she argued against marriage and wanted to remain his mistress. Does the lady abbess of thirty, the friend of pious bishops and guardian of the virtue of a community of nuns, blush to read

of her early wickedness? Not in the least. Abelard, she says, has not given her arguments in full:

> You have omitted some in which I preferred love to marriage, liberty to a chain. I call God to witness that if Augustus, the emperor of the whole world, were to offer me marriage and a promise that I should rule the world forever, I should find it dearer and nobler to be your mistress than his empress. For a man is not the better because he is strong or rich: that is a matter of fortune, not virtue.

She reminds him how proud she was that the great master belonged to her, and his songs made men speak of her everywhere. All the women of Paris were eager for him, but he chose her. And it was she, not her body merely, that he sought. People had said: "It was desire, not friendship, that linked you to me and ardor of lust, not love." She denies it and wants him to write and deny it. Is it true that when he could no longer have carnal pleasure with her he deserted her? That, she says, is not merely an idea that occurs to her. It is what people are saying. She is quite clearly trying to get a love-letter from him. Remember, she says, that "it was no sentiment of religion but merely your command that compelled me to embrace the rigor of the monastic life." She expects no reward from God, as she "did not do it to please him." She reminds him,

too, how he hurt her feelings by insisting that she should make the vows before he did, as if he could not trust her. Why, she exclaims, "I would not hesitate a moment to go before you or after you to hell if you bade me!" Her soul is entirely with him or "it is nowhere." Let him remember the fiery love-songs and letters he wrote when he wanted pleasure with her, and let him now write to her and try to make her more religious.

This rebellious and extraordinary letter—the passages I have quoted were afterwards solemnly condemned by the doctors of Paris—clearly embarrassed Alebard. His reply was very bloodless and nervous. He had not written to her, he explained, because he was unaware that she needed spiritual consolation and exhortation. He thought that she was quite happy in her religious world. She must give him some idea of the way in which he can counsel her. The letter is a string of platitudes and quotations from Scripture. Not a line of it is worth quoting. There is not a single syllable in it of the stuff which some of the supposed translations give instead of it. Abelard has not the least desire to keep up communication with his wife, and he does not say a single word about their love. In the

end, it is true, he says that if his monks succeed in killing him, as they are still trying to do, he trusts that Heloise will see that his body is brought to the Paraclete and buried in her cemetery; but even here he is careful to explain that it is because the spot, his old school, is dear to him, not that his body may be near to her, as the romanticists say.

Heloise was just as obviously disappointed, but she made one more effort. He had written to his "beloved sister." She replies to "the one beloved after Christ," and scolds him for marking the letter "to Heloise from Abelard," thus putting her name before his. As to the words about his death and burial: "Oh dearest, how could you conceive such a thing, how say it?" She prays the Lord that he will take her from the world first. She is "the most miserable and unfortunate of all women," and she is hopelessly puzzled by the fact that they were so happy when they were sinful and smitten by the hand of the Lord only when they entered upon a respectable marriage:

> As long as we enjoyed the pleasure of our love—if I may use a more expressive but shameful word, of our fornication—the divine severity spared us. But when we turned the illicit into licit, when we covered the shame of fornication with the decent veil of marriage, the anger of the Lord made his hand heavy against us: he would not endure the stainless bed though he had so long tolerated the

polluted. What other men suffer for adultery you suffered for marriage: what adulterous women do for their fornicators, this thy own wife did for thee.

In fact, he alone has really suffered, and she writes a little essay, in the usual pessimist vein, on all the evils that women have brought upon men. But if he thinks that she is fully repentant over her misdeeds he is mistaken:

The pleasures of love which we enjoyed together were so sweet to me that I am quite unable to feel remorse or banish them from my memory. Whithersoever I turn they confront me ever with the desires they inspire. They spare me not their illusions even when I sleep. Even during the solemn ceremony of the mass, when our prayers ought to be purest, the obscene images of those pleasures so captivate the whole of my unhappy soul that I yield myself to their turpitude rather than to prayer. When I ought to be lamenting what I did I am sighing for what I have lost. Not only what we did, but the very times and places in which we did them are so fixed in my mind that I do everything over again with you and desist not even when I sleep. At times the movements of my body reveal my thoughts and I break into imprudent words.

He, she reminds him, has been spared all this by his wound, but she suffers terribly. "The ardor of youth and my experience of those sweet pleasures excite in me all the more those movements of the flesh and impulses of lust." People call her chaste only because they do not know her hypocrisy. She abstains in body but not in soul. She thinks of nothing but Abelard. "God knows that in every act of

my life I fear to offend thee rather than him; I desire to please thee rather than him." If Abelard imagines that she is happy and submissive he does not know her. She is a hypocrite. He must not talk about her goodness and virtue, for it would be a lie. And not so much talk, please, about a heavenly crown. "I don't want the crown of victory," she exclaims; "in whatever corner of heaven God puts me I shall be content."

So wrote the pious abbess of thirty to the austere abbot of forty in the thirteenth century; and it is impossible for any romanticist to improve on such a passage as this. I have said that the heart of the poor woman breaks at times through the formal rhetoric, and we certainly recognize it here. It is difficult to understand her mind: perhaps impossible for us of a very different age to understand it. But the romantic versions of the letters are wrong in their way. They just represent Heloise as one of the loose abbesses of the time who yields to her sentiments and flies to the confessional to avoid the unpleasant consequences. Heloise remembers in her most rebellious moments what the law of the Church is. To understand her one has to remember the terrific pressure of belief in her age. One

feels at times that her mind is not far from a sentiment of general skepticism about religion. "Oh, if I dared but call God cruel to me," she says; and again, "How can I appease God when I am always accusing him of the deepest cruelty for this affliction?" Such language would be quite impossible to a mind that believed without wavering. Yet in a world where not a single man or woman ever entertained the slightest doubt about the truth of religion it was impossible for her to go further.

On the other hand, the romantic view of her is wrong in the sense that, at least when she found how little Abelard now cared about her, she would, if they correctly represent her, not have checked her desires at all. She had been quite familiar all her life with irregularities in nunneries. Lax convents, the writers of the times say, were then more numerous than strict convents. Bayle and other Franch writers are so impressed by the violence and freedom of the language that they do not believe her own assurance that she is chaste at least in body, but that is clearly a false interpretation. The woman who thus bares her soul so boldly is not the kind of woman who would, at the very time when she is accusing

herself of hyprocrisy of spirit, go out of her way to claim chastity of body if it were not true. In fact, no writer of the time, though the enemies of Abelard would soon have accused her, charges her or her convent with irregular conduct. The Abbot of Cluny, a strict prelate, corresponded most respectfully with her, and even the arch-puritan St. Bernard wrote her. We may take it that they never read the volcanic passages of her letters. It was not until a century later that they were made public.

In fact, Abelard's reply to her second letter seems to have caused her, in resignation or despair, to have crushed the feelings of her heart. "To the spouse of Christ from the servant of God" is the superscription; and the letter is a frigid dialectical attempt to change her mind. He justifies pedantically the title of his last letter, and at great length, and morbidly, he proves that it was quite proper for him to talk to her about his death and burial. Thirdly, he says, we come to our "old and perpetual quarrel." He gives her cold logic for her heart-cries against providence. Why were they rewarded with happiness when they lived in sin and punished when, after marriage, they were innocent? It

is quite easy. They were not innocent. Does she not remember that occasion when he visited her at Argenteuil and what they did in the corner of the refectory of the convent? They defiled the holy house. Also, when he took her away to his sister's house in the disguise of a nun, he desecrated holy things.

He goes from bad to worse; and it is a curious fact that one of the heresies found in his work at the second trial was that he found the conjugal relations of married folk not quite free from the taint of sin. They have not been "punished" at all, he says. They have been rescued from the "vile and obscene pleasures" of matrimony, the "mud and mire" of conjugal relations. That wound of his which she deplores as a chastisement was intended only "to remove the root of all vice and sordidness from me and make me fitter for the service of the altar." He almost warms to his argument; the romanticists, to regard him still as a lover, however chastened and repentant—they make him say that he is still "fighting against my excessive tenderness for thee"—have to destroy the entire sense of such dreary passages as this:

I had deserved death, and I received life. Do thou, then, unite with me in thanksgiving, my inseparable companion, who hast shared both my sin and my reward. . . . For if thou hast not been joined to me in matrimony, it might easily have happened that thou wouldst have remained in the world. Oh how dread a loss, how lamentable an evil it had been, if in the seeking of carnal pleasure thou hadst borne a few children in pain to the world, whereas thou now bearest so great a progeny with joy to heaven. . . . Christ is thy

true lover, not I: all that I sought in thee was the satisfaction of my miserable pleasure.

This ended the love-letters of Heloise. There was as much chance of squeezing blood out of one of the stones of her convent as out of the heart of Abelard. Mutilation, persecution, treachery, and misery had made him almost inhuman. Heloise resigned herself to the world into which she had been born. Not a word of love or of suppressed passion appears in her next letter. She cannot change his nature, she says, but "just as one nail is driven out by another, so it is with thoughts." She is going to occupy herself with other matters. Will Abelard tell her, for instance, what was the origin and early history of monarchism? Will he write a new rule of life for her and her sisters? She knows the rule of St. Benedict, but it is masculine. In fact, she does not want too ascetic a rule; a point which she supports from the pagan authorities which she has always at hand. They are to be allowed meat and wine; on the strength of the supposed opinion of Aristotle she proves that wine does not sexually stimulate women as it does men. What about their dress, their beads, their visitors? She is not at all sure that the place is made safe by excluding men. "Certainly in seducing a woman the blandishment of a woman is the most effective instrument."

But there is no need to quote from this letter. The phrases which are put into it in some versions—"grace has opened my eyes" and "I have torn you from my heart"—have nothing whatever corresponding to them in the original. She never mentions any change. But,

within limits, she is now going to play the game and be a real nun—since there is no alternative. Abelard composed a rule for her and her sisters; and to some extent it took into account her wishes about being moderate in asceticism, or rather in avoiding asceticism. We have the manuscript of Abelard's rule, and at the end of it some other hand has written a shorter and more temperate rule. Probably this was done by Heloise. Later again she sent a list of forty-two "problems" which occurred to her in connection with the scriptures and religion. She had by no means entirely abandoned her skeptical tendency. And this is the last we hear of her. Abelard returned to the teaching world, and St. Bernard began the final attack and condemnation which broke his spirit. He died in a priory of the great and strict abbey of Cluny, in an atmosphere of profound piety; and the abbot of Cluny found, when Heloise asked him for the worn body, that the monks of this priory were so sternly bent on keeping the holy relics, that he had to steal it by night and send it to Heloise. She died twenty-one years later; and legend has it that when they laid her body beside the bones of her husband, the skeleton miraculously opened its arms to receive her.

When the modern age of criticism and disillusion opened there were, of course, some who questioned the genuineness of the letters of Abelard and Heloise. But to doubt the genuineness of the letters of Abelard is extravagant, for the character of the man, just as we should expect it in the painful circumstances, is seen in every phrase; and the style is that

of Abelard. Nor is there any serious question about the letters of Heloise. A personality of the most unusual and most intriguing character is revealed in them, and it is just the kind of personality which the description of Heloise and her arguments against marriage in Abelard's first letter would lead us to expect. At the most we may admit that some of the more violent phrases I have quoted from Heloise may be interpolations, but the replies and arguments of Abelard imply that she really did write to him in that vein. There is a ring of sincerity in just those sentences. It was a letter-writing age, and some of the passages are formally elaborated, but these ejaculations of a heart that is oppressed by the duality of life, the impulse and the law, the fair promise of nature and the cause of fate, are unmistakable.

The real interest of the letters has merely been obscured by the parodies of them which have circulated since the sixteenth century. Pope clearly had an entirely false idea of Heloise in his mind; an idea which was partly due to free translations but also to his misconception of the sort of life that Heloise and her nuns would lead. There were no "deep solitudes and awful cells" at the Paraclete, no "relentless walls" or "rugged rocks which holy knees have worn." To the end Heloise refused to be ascetic. She insisted that many had, like herself, not been attracted to the conventual life by love of it, and she was going to have them fairly comfortable. Yet the psychology of the woman is so peculiar that Pope is nearest the truth when he himself

probably thought his verse a very free rendering. His contemporaries at least must have smiled when he makes the lady abbess say:

Should at my feet the world's great Masters fall,
Himself, his throne, his world, I'd scorn 'em all;
Not Caesar's empress would I deign to prove;
No, make me mistress to the man I love;
If there be yet another name more free,
More fond than mistress, make me that to thee.

Yet this is an almost literal poetic translation of what Heloise actually said. I repeat that the only explanation is that she was born to be a great rebel, if not a great woman, but she was born seven centuries too early. Naturally I also here am speaking poetically. One does not bring into the world the endowment of a rebel, beyond certain peculiarities of nerve and temperament. But most of my readers will know from my historical work what there was in the intellectual environment of the twelfth century that inspired the rebellions of Abelard and Heloise. The name of their boy, Astrolabe, clearly indicates it; the spirit of the Moors and Saracens which was just now beginning to awaken Europe from its barbarism. In his first letter Abelard expressly says that he was tempted to fly from Christendom and live amongst these "enemies of Christ." I wrote my "Peter Abelard," in which you will find, if you care, a picturesque study of this age and the great lovers, nearly thirty years ago, yet I already pointed out this influence. It explains what seems to us so modern, so strangely anticipatory of the modern spirit, in the unechoed agonies of that dear woman's heart seven hundred years ago.

LOVE STORIES

6 Love and Other Stories
21 Carmen
58 Tales From the Decameron
89 Love Letters of People of Genius
219 Story of Human Tradgedy
283 Courtship of Miles Standish
314 Short Stories of French Life
404 Romances of Paris
434 Love of Lord Nelson & Lady Hamilton
672 Illicit Love
673 Tales of Love and Life
733 Brazilian Love Stories
803 Costa Rican Love Tales
817 Her Burning Secret
975 Cleopatra and Her Loves
958 Love Tales of Italian Life
1045 Story of a Mad Sweetheart
1176 A Mad Love
1610 One Lover Among Many
1620 Merry Tales
1622 Five Women & the Grand Passion
1623 Who Seduced the Cook
1624 Woman Who Inspired Fatal Passion
1633 Exploits of a Fiddler
1655 The Accursed Woman
1684 To Please His Wife

Any 10 for $1, 20 for $2, etc. PREPAID.

Free catalogues with every order. Write only the numbers on a scrap of paper, with your name and address. Send cash, check or money order to:

Little-Blue-Books Dept. CV Girard, Kans

SEX EDUCATION

74 Physiology of Sex Life
91 Manhood
92 How to Love
163 Sex Life in Greece and Rome
172 Evolution of Sex
328 Plain Talks with Husbands and Wives
372 Problems of Birth Control
692 Homosexual Life
964 Sex Symbolism
964 How to be Happy Though Married
968 Art of Courtship
1168 Sexual Crimes and American Law
1342 Typical Love Problems
1343 Sex Relation in the Southern States
1428 Curous and Unusual Love Affairs
1496 Sexual Factor in Divorce
1498 Missouri University Sex Questionaire
1546 Encyclopedia of Sex
1564 Homosexuality in Lives of the Great
1709 The White Slave Traffic
1718 Sexual Impotence
1736 Dictionary of Sexual Terms
1737 Sex and Blackmail Rackets Exposed
1823 Problems of Adolescence
1851 Art of Intimacy in Marriage
1854 Confessions of a Transvestist

Any 10 for $1, 20 for $2, etc. PREPAID

Free catalogues with every order. Write only the numbers in a scrap of paper, with your name and address. Send cash, check or money order to:

Little-Blue Books, Dept CV Girard, Kans